



Ecological Society of America
1990 M Street, NW
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Washington, DC 20036

May 18, 2016

Dr. Oyun Sanjaasuren
President, United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA)
United Nations Environment Programme
United Nations Avenue, Gigiri
PO Box 30552, 00100
Nairobi, Kenya

Dear Dr. Oyun:

On behalf of the Ecological Society of America (ESA), the world's largest professional society of ecologists, I am writing in support of a proposal to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly to recognize 2020 as an "International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists." ESA hopes that you and the UN Environment Assembly will support this proposal when it comes before the UN General Assembly.

Nearly half of the Earth's land surface is classified as *rangeland* and *grassland*, and the health and productivity of these lands are critical to the livelihoods of an estimated 500 million people around the world. Rangeland and grassland habitats provide a multitude of ecosystem services. They help mitigate droughts and floods, aid in seed dispersal, control agricultural pests and deter soil erosion. They also protect downstream water resources from runoff and maintain ecosystem biodiversity and climate stability. In addition to providing resources for livestock production and crop irrigation, they offer recreational and ecotourism activities.

Despite their many benefits, these lands are at risk due to a number of threats including cropland expansion, wildland fires, habitat fragmentation, invasive species, and climate change. Designating an "International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists" would invigorate the scientific community to identify practical and strategic solutions that address these threats.

The Society appreciates your global leadership on environmental stewardship and thanks you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Monica Turner
ESA President